

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS ACTUALIZATION: THE STRATEGIC ROLES OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES.

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Abstract

To enumerate the milestone reached in international cooperation as pertaining to inspiring development efforts embedded in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as set out by the United Nations in 2000, with the sole aim of improving the lives of about two billion people around the world, is to recount the obvious relevance. Its pertinence is more weighty and significant to Africa and Asia continents, knowing that a large proportion of the world-poorest are densely concentrated in them. This work identifies, analyzes and enumerates the roles of Nigerian universities in attaining Millennium Development Goals by 2015. It also submits that strategic massification and vision specificity are indispensable routes through which most developing world countries both in Asia and Africa can accomplish the behemoth task before them in terms of poverty reduction, hunger elimination, education and environmental targets.

Keyword: MDG, universities, vision specificity, poverty, education, environmental targets

Introduction

International cooperation, under the auspices of United Nations Organization, attained a laudable landmark in 2000 with the strong emphasis on making exceptional progress in key areas of human development at the dawn of the third millennium. Eradication of poverty and hunger, attainment of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, reduction in child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, ensuring environment sustainability, development of global partnerships for development are the eight original formulations[1]. This work is concerned with the first two goals, seventh goal and the roles Nigerian universities must play, knowing that each goal is a time-bound target that are to be achieved between 1990 and 2015. With a conclusion that education is key to human-

centred sustainable development, which empowers people to get out of poverty, improves their living conditions, and acts as an instrument for social mobility[2]. It is therefore imperative to explore the roles universities must play to eradicate poverty, educate the citizenry and sustain the environment. Nigeria, home to 2.3% of the world population[3], seventh largest nation by population and most populous nation in Africa with 158,423,000 people, is adjudged to be a good picture for analyzing the extent of achievement and success of MDG in developing countries for this report.

Nigeria: MDG Progress Measurement

Notwithstanding the poor data management and the historical gap in baseline data eminent in Nigerian statistics, report shows that Nigeria is making progress with recent developments. It was also concluded that several goals may

not be attained if more are not done in terms of innovative governance reforms, finance, social infrastructure development and coordination, sustained economic growth, improvements in planning and policy, and growing government investment in the social sector [4]. For the goals to be attained, creation of an enabling and secured environment for business, including building critical social infrastructure, making regulatory services transparent and providing sustainable access to enterprise finance is inevitable. For this, strategic development programs need to be scaled-up and better coordinated.

With the low primary and secondary completion rates, despite the rapid growth in youth literacy to 80% in 2008 [5], it is imperative to consider the learning environments and point to the urgent need to raise teaching standards. It has also been submitted that the promising Universal Basic Education Scheme needs to be reformed and strengthened with a focus on meeting the specific critical needs of rural and local communities [6]. Improving the quality of teaching through the provision of teaching aids, standard teaching environment and world-class, 21st century, teacher training institutions is obviously a prerequisite. To accelerate progress and reduce regional disparities, these initiatives need to be rapidly expanded and improved.

Environmental sustainability is a task that requires deep thought, especially in Nigeria. With a shrink of 33% in forest to land ratio within 2000 and 2010 [7], it is explicitly analytical that Nigerian forest will vanish in 2030, if the rate of deforestation is maintained

without a determined plan to ensure its sustainability. 59% of the population has access to potable water and 52% have access to good sanitation. Intensive public investment into potable water provision by harnessing the potentials of water courses and modern technology has been emphasized. Poor town planning and high rural to urban migration rate are central to the pressure on sanitation infrastructure throughout the country. There is an urgent need for managerial, technical and financial resources to deal with these challenges. Such measures are to be established at state and local government levels. Given the risks of overexploitation of groundwater in the North and the influx of saline water in the South, innovative solutions are required across the country [8].

Nigerian State: Socio-Economic Problems

The essence of a responsive and responsible government is focused on the security and welfare of the people [9]. This primary purpose of government means that the government must ensure that suitable and adequate shelter and food, a reasonable national minimum living wage, old-age care and pensions, and unemployment benefits are provided for the citizens. If that is the yardstick to measure a nation's performance, then Nigeria will be close to zero, considering the myriads of problems such as inadequate human development, inefficient agricultural systems, weak infra-structure, lacklustre growth in the manufacturing sector, a poor policy and regulatory environment, misuse and mismanagement of resources. With the aforementioned problems, the Millennium Development Goals attainment seems to be shadowy, given the remaining time frame of

four years. However, the real question is: what are the specific roles for tertiary institutions, especially the Universities, in attaining the hunger, poverty and environmental goals of MDG? In what ways can the universities help in achieving the main objective of Nigeria's economic development in terms of stability, material prosperity, peace and social progress?

MDG Actualization: Preparatory Steps for Nigerian Universities.

Redesigning Universities' Curriculum:

Though the eight goals and the eighteen targets of the millennium declaration in 2000 are general, for it to be effectively and efficiently attained, each nation needs to ratify the objectives to meet her specific needs. Paramount to total liberation is the identification of local problems. In that case, Nigeria is no exception. It is therefore imperative for Nigerian's universities to identify the specific needs in terms of human capital development inter alia and this can only be done with a clearly structured and designed curriculum which integrates our culture diversity with the impounding problem peculiarity. The universities' education curriculum experts should harness a synergic approach at giving birth to a total-man concept curriculum, shaping the future of our nation youths towards greatness. It is essential to have an educational curriculum that keeps every Nigeria child from nursery school to university on the edge and empowers every child with information not only to be conversant with relevant global knowledge on millennium goals but to build them with capabilities to be sound minds economically and intellectually.

University Oriented Policy Formulation:

The key factor militating against development in African nations is the lack and non-implementation, where it exists, of research based policy formulation, instrumentation and execution. Universities' experts are equipped with relevant knowledge and skills in drawing facts and conclusions on issues plaguing socio-economic viability. Governments, at all level, in African politics should harness the power of knowledge in the formulation of policies and politics affecting poverty eradication, hunger reduction, agricultural growth and environmental sustainability. It is judicious and feasibly viable in terms of its economics. The universities' academics should design seminars and programs at intimating the government and its agents on the roles universities can plan in assisting the law-makers and political policy formulators through synergy. The universities should also showcase in practical terms the relevance of collaboration between the two arms through the use of enlightenment with the historical situations obtainable in advanced countries.

Establishment of sustainable Academic and industry linkage and relationship:

Without a strong inter-dependence between industries and the academic communities, the pathway to attaining poverty reductions through job creation and hunger eradication through mechanized agriculture cannot be established. The existing gap between these two inseparable domains must be bridged for our dream to be realized. One key factor that brings industrialization is the production of new knowledge through research and development and its subsequent usage by industries to solve

problems and advance their economic profitability. This is the secret of industrialized nation. Research organizations should identify reasons why there exists this gap and non-interaction between the academic world and the existing industries. Such reasons should also be researched for the purpose of identifying ways to solve them and, thereby, set Nigeria on the path of greatness and millennium development goals actualization.

ROLES OF UNIVERSITIES IN MDG

Vision Specificity and Defined Target for Nigerian Universities: This could also be named branding of tertiary institutions, especially the universities and the technical schools. In developed nations of Western Europe, universities are hubs where specific researches of national interests are domiciliated. For instance, Cambridge University is known for biotechnological research advancement. Imperial University is worldly acclaimed for petro-chemical technology, Harvard University for law and economics. It is also important to note that universities are branded based on the resources and the industries available in their locations. Where this is not applicable, the universities create research identities and brands that bring industries and people of interest closer or nearer. In addition to that, Nigerian Universities' Commission, the governing body, should constitute a research parastatal whose function will be the creation of vision specificity and defined targets in terms of research products expectation from all tertiary institutions. Such a parastatal should work in collaboration and as a support system, rather than another watchdog, to the institutions.

Socio-Economic Research

Education and training emerge as a major factor in the reduction of poverty [10]. Research centres in university should look critically into the social aspect of communities with the aim of advising local, state and federal governments on most appropriate methods to turn locally available resources into business units that will engage the residents. In another work, it has been submitted that there is a generally low performance in most of the established non-university located research centres. This is attributed to lack of willpower, vision specificity and defined targets. Where these vital points are defined, lack of proper sanctions, monitoring, implementation, accountability and responsibility coupled with corruption and fund embezzlement on the parts of leadership jeopardize success. Essentially, socio-research centres, with clear targets and vision specificity where the aforementioned factors have been eliminated, will not only provide advisory services to government, private sector and non-governmental organizations but also provide professional development through the training of students for the labour market and other endeavours as it is pioneered in Covenant University.

Knowledge and Idea Generation

Each country is endowed with specific material assets in addition to human capital. Therefore, one of the strategic roles of Nigerian universities should be to assume their rightful place by harnessing the power of investigative, scientific and social research in providing academic leadership. Critical areas of national development should be researched in creating advanced knowledge [11]. It has been reported that every Nigerian state is endowed with at

least seven solid minerals [12]. With 37.2 billion proven oil reserves (14th in the world and 8th in OPEC) and about 184 trillion cubic feet gas reserves, seventh world largest[13], universities are challenged to create knowledge and advancement. Strategic location of tertiary institutions where these resources are found with clearly defined goals and vision specificity will lead to knowledge discovery. This will, in turn, open up the various communities for educational growth and industrialization. The local people trained in the universities with specific skills, as relevant to the resource development, will be absorbed into the system. This will in turn solve the unemployment problems and also reduce rural-to-urban mass relocation. Rural towns will grow into urban centres. Idea creation is, therefore, the foremost role of universities. Providing academic leadership through high quality research into critical areas of national development known as knowledge creation [14] is critical to attaining the set targets, especially those on poverty reduction, gender education equality and environmental sustainability.

Educational Social Mobility Promotion:

Much progress has been made through the basic primary education scheme but the real question of the completion rate to secondary education should be of greater concern. The quality of the gained knowledge in juxtaposition to the foundational knowledge required for tertiary education has always been irreconcilable. Educational social mobility promotion is one way the universities can tackle the militating factors to achieving the educational targets of the millennium development goals. This includes the support

for lower levels of education to enlarge training opportunities. By that, the training opportunities will be all inclusive. The teachers and the students are all to be exposed to research based findings coming from the established universities serving a specific goal in the community. There should be seminars and conferences organized by the university experts in opening up the students and the teachers to new techniques both in learning and in teaching. In addition to that, there should be affirmative action to facilitate entry of disadvantaged groups, more of which are in the northern region of the country, into the more competitive areas of study. Skillfully designed actions at encouraging and retaining disadvantaged groups in higher education institution should be employed in other to meet our targets.

Continuing Education Programs: Illiterate adults as well as working persons education is another area that could jeopardize millennium development goals actualization. Working personalities are also inclusive since it is a known fact that learning for nation's development is a lifelong activity. Universities are vital to handling continuous education of these groups. Analysis should be carried out to accurately identify the needs as well as the population of the working persons and the adult in every university cities and towns. This is vital to the development, structure and specificity of education programs of such people. Short courses, weekend management training and specialized technical training are some of the continuous education programs engaged by independent private organizations and industries in Nigeria. It is high time experts in universities designed research-based

programs for every industrial and commercial community as well as illiterate adults, illiterate personal business owners and traders, with the sole focus of maximizing and marrying the capability of human resource with material resource optimization

Promoting Economic Growth: Reducing poverty and hunger remains a key development challenge in Nigeria. Sustainable economic growth is critical for poverty reduction since job creation is a natural index for growing economy. Diverse growth that creates jobs has great potential to reduce, if not eradicate, poverty. But, the improvement in growth in Nigeria over the past decade has not brought about the desired reduction in poverty [15]. It is therefore imperative to look at growth dynamics and factors. The role of the university is clear in this aspect. Scientific research into electrical, nuclear and alternative power generation, distribution and consumption as well as power/energy policy formulation on the identified energy sources is inevitable. The universities should work on getting to work a nationwide consortium among engineering intellectuals, organizations and policy formulation experts, both local and foreign stakeholders in the economic arena of the nation, in the review of existing energy policies and laws with the aim of unraveling the power mystery in Nigeria. They should identify the energy consumptions of various regions and local resources in such regions with the aim of designing or identifying the appropriate energy generation technology for the much needed industrialization, which is a vital key to solving unemployment, poverty and hunger, for economic growth. In addition, deliberate policies to create and foster gainful

employment for the unemployed and to spread opportunities to empower people should be worked out. This requires the intensification of poverty programs and approaches. Policies and measures at federal, state and local government levels should endeavour to enhance the productivity of enterprises, particularly in agriculture and SMEs. The universities should also work with appropriate quarters in identifying ways and steps to increase labour productivity. Expanding the number of courses and choices of study and improving relevance of skills acquired in such created fields of endeavours should be a central focus of education policy experts in this time of knowledge-based global economy.

Role on Environmental Sustainability: Establishing environmental commissions and specialized authorities on the basis of political affiliations is counterproductive. It is essential to know that such commissions and authorities should not only consult university environmental experts on issues but they should be taken as integral members, right from the outset and conception of such commissions. With their wealth of knowledge and experience on environment, they should be the policy, goal and vision formulators. Involving academics in awareness creation especially at the community level given the high calling placed on them at those levels as opinion leaders, mentors and role models, facilitating development of relevant literature in environmental sustainability to suit all relevant groups and strategic training and upgrading of knowledge for all categories of environmental officers are fundamental roles of universities in achieving the environmental

sustainability targets of the millennium development goals.

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